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Steve Hindle. *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550-1750.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. xi + 521 pp. $123.94 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-927132-0.

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On the Parish? is a big book in every sense of the word. Hindle recreates the relations between giver, ratepayer, officer, and recipient over time in dense detail. The plus points are numerous, and poverty, policy, and the poor will never look the same again. On the other side of the account, this book is too long, and too many examples are used to make a single point in some of the thickest description that I have ever encountered. It is first and foremost an archival work (the manuscript bibliography is rather like a traveler's guide to record offices in all corners of the land), but one with a purpose to dig up the "micropolitics" of formal and informal giving and to weigh the relative scale of each over time. In some senses this is the story of people who received aid "properly" and played by the book to get hand-outs. Most of the disruption it reports comes from the other side of the gift: reluctant ratepayers, craftsmen unhappy that one day they were told to take in a pauper apprentice, or overseers going to court to query relief orders. This is a book about how "middling" men came to terms over decades with a state system of giving to the needy (there was a legal obligation not to place overly heavy loads on ratepayers). Its cast of paupers comes almost entirely from the "dependent" and "laboring poor," and the latter group is the more interesting, hovering around the poverty line and slipping into need in hard times.

One aim of this book is to examine their "ambiguous relationship with the parish relief system" (p. 14). Other core ideas force us to think long and hard about the impact of the Poor Law: poor relief and parish relief were "not necessarily synonymous" (p. 4); "statutory prescription was not invariably reflected in, and indeed was frequently modified by, social practice" (p. 5); "a persistent concern with the parameters of eligibility for, and entitlement to, various forms of relief did a very great deal to fashion the distinctive shape of rural social relations" (p. 7). By the end of this book we have a strong sense of how "the experience of poor relief" changed for good in the second half of the seventeenth century. Giving was now motivated by "formal sanctions" and no longer by neighborliness, and was more and more "an expression of hierarchy and subordination"; "policies of deterrence" tried to push people off relief rolls and into work; "formal and informal relief" were no longer tangled as pension payments climbed to levels that slashed the need for personal charity (pp. 453-454).

To get to these positions, six chapters look in turn at "Shift," "Dole," "Work," "Collection," "Exclusion," and "Negotiation." Chapter 1 takes us through other sorts of support for the needy–common rights, "crimes of necessity," and help from kin or neighbors–that with "formal" giving might help them to keep their heads above water. There was not an inevitable shift from informal to formal care, parish pensions were still topped up by charity *circa* 1750. But the balance tilted towards the Poor Law "machine" as time passed, not least because many of the poor's makeshifts to keep suffering at bay became "subject at least to official regulation if not outright prohibition" (p. 21). There was rarely enough work to go around and some seasons offered more than others, so the laboring poor were perched precariously around the poverty line, getting by through "improvisation and expedience," dreading harvest failure, industrial slumps, and bad luck (p. 24). They could fall back on cottage gardens, common rights, scraping together food and fuel in fields and woods, and best of all keeping cows on common waste. But opportunities dwindled over time as common rights became more stringently regulated and restricted: en-

closure sucked up common land, squatters were moved on, "stinting out" stripped access to communal resources to people living in long-standing commonable cottages, gleaning was cut back through tighter definitions and prosecution clampdowns. All in all, the "economy of makeshifts" was worth less by 1700, even though it kept its meaning in appeals to necessity and custom. Kin helped out needy family members through lodging most of all. Paupers could also count on neighbors, though less so as time passed. But the signs all seemed to point in one direction; towards formal state provision. Customs became crimes, and traditional neighborly whip-rounds at church-ales and help-ales were steadily replaced by bureaucratic assessments in poor rates.

The second chapter turns to "the texture and significance of semi-formal relief" in pauper budgets–alms, doles, endowments (perpetual doles)–and homes in on core themes in this book: the continuing existence of private charity, the role of the demeanor of would-be recipients in eligibility for relief, and their strategies to get access to the charity pot. Parish pensions were not enough to get by, especially before 1650. People came up with many ways to help their hard-up neighbors. Alms-giving went up and down according to need, and soared in hard times like 1586-87 when dearth left the poor scrambling for scarce bread and better-offs put in place what Hindle calls "charities of abstinence": fasting, prayer, and open-handed almsgiving (p. 119). Casual doles continued all year long and could add up to something significant in funeral bequests to the poor that were regular if small, and often singled out the most needy, weak, and sickly. Doles were vital top-ups. But in dishing them out, magistrates and the well-to-do spread "a myth of community" that smoothed over deepening inequalities, with them in the leading roles of warmhearted paternal guardians who made sure that the poor felt that they belonged (pp. 166-167). Eligibility became the rule of thumb when handing out doles, not expectation or entitlement.

Pauper apprenticeship is the hub of the chapter on work, and it breaks new ground in pointing out (with Sir Simon Harcourt in 1705) that this was "the best way of providing for the poor" (p. 191). Hindle gives us the best discussion to date on the work schemes in the Elizabethan statutes, and I like his depiction of the vestry as a "job-creation service" (p. 176). Setting the poor on work was not a great success and plans often fell by the wayside, though there were spurts of activity, like the "high-water mark" after the Book of Orders in 1630-31 (p. 185). Pauper apprenticeship was a better option for work discipline. The children of the poor were placed in homes where they might pick up job training and some good habits. Compulsion opened up a can of worms, however. Judicial benches took the line that statutes implied that masters had no choice but to accept children sent their way by parishes, but matters were fuzzy on the ground and also in the minds of Michael Dalton and Matthew Hale. When a big push came with the Caroline enforcement drive, many masters stood their ground and would not take in needy children. Pauper apprenticeship looked to be on its last legs deep into the seventeenth century, until an Act of 1697 breathed new life into it with quotas of needy young that masters and mistresses could be forced to take. Afterwards, Hindle argues, the enforced binding out of pauper children looked suspiciously like a deterrent, designed to deter people from submitting claims, who otherwise were thinking about going on the parish.

The chapter "Collection" measures the spread of formal relief, up and down rural England, in patterned pictures that highlight varied provision between and within areas of the country. Long before 1700, southern parishes were in general giving higher pensions, though parishes sitting side by side did not always give at the same rate; disparities in wealth, social structure, and population size could make all the difference. Rural England was a "complex patchwork of prosperous and pauperized regions and sub-regions" (p. 284). This chapter looks at the balance between formal and informal giving. We are not exactly sure when rating became widespread in rural areas. Doles, communion collections, and hospitality exemplified the charity of Elizabethan country folk. It took time for parish relief to make up a noteworthy share of paupers' needs, and up until 1650 (at least) no family could have scratched a living without informal hand-outs. The system set up in 1598 "only gradually transformed the logic of medieval charity" (p. 297). Rating was on the rise after the sharp shocks of harvest failure in 1629-31, and relief costs were bumped up in the next such calamity in the late 1640s to levels that did not drop. Working with parish accounts, Hindle argues that by the 1630s "the overwhelming majority of parishes over most of the country" were "incorporated into a bureaucratic national system in which income was generated by rating and assessment" (p. 296). "Virtually every parish" was locked into this system six decades later (p. 256). Somewhere in the region of 5-6 percent of country people were "on the parish," though numbers ebbed and flowed in good or bad times. The "poor by casualty" dominated the columns of relief rolls, widows more than any other group, and they usually picked up pensions for anywhere between five

or twelve years. Sixpence was the most common payment early on, though average weekly hand-outs reached a shilling in many places towards 1700. But casual payments continued, tailored in some respects to the changing needs of the laboring poor, revealing some sympathy for the scale of local misery.

Parish coffers were stretched, however, and a chapter on "exclusion" delves deeply into the qualification of belonging to the parish in order to get relief in the first place, but also to limit eligibility and cut costs by getting rid of pariahs. The crux of the matter was a tension between the onus to give to the settled poor in the 1598/1601 statutes and a 1589 law regulating inmates and lodgers that put exclusionary powers in the hands of parishes and manors. Exclusion also covers statutory and judicial interpretations of settlement after 1662, and marriage as a key moment that gave parishes opportunities to identify and exclude hard-up strangers. Parish relief depended on bars on outsiders. A careful eye had to be kept on nearby parishes who tried to shift the burden of caring for someone down-on-luck elsewhere. Time after time these exclusion acts did not bring the desired results, and Hindle wonders what this means for relations between neighboring parishes as well as inside parishes as some people were happy to take hard-up tenants who would one day fall on the parish. Migration was sometimes welcome if cheap labor was in short supply or in the case of high-value occupations, like blacksmiths. But parishes took radical steps when rates reached sky-high levels, turning to pre-emptive removals and indemnity bonds, and putting a stop to pauper marriages. Things took a turn for the better when population pressure softened after 1650 and settlement laws spelled out parochial responsibilities, though even then decisions were still in the hands of parish officers who were quite prepared to kick out vagrants and impotent poor no matter what judges advised.

Parish pensioners were only ever a tiny fraction of paupers, and the last chapter zooms in on people in need but not on relief rolls and "the micro-politics at play in the assessment and disbursement of parish relief" (p. 363). Right to relief "was negotiated in the course of local practice" (p. 446). The Elizabethan laws did not grant entitlement, and in the minds of parish officers paupers in their midst were eligible but not entitled to hand-outs. Giving and withholding were based on eligibility. Getting a pension was a process or "game," a "game" that "was played by widely accepted rules," chief among them that "the poor should demonstrate gratitude" (p. 447). Paupers put their cases and "played" along, but if this can be called "negotiation" it sometimes seems like a one-sided conversation. Poor and power are words that do not go together well. The limits on pauper agency were tightly defined, and overall the laboring poor had less scope to scheme as time passed. More deterrents blocked their path to relief rolls towards 1700: the canceling of relief orders, workhouse tests, and the parish badge. There was widespread concern by this time about higher costs and that the poor might see relief as their right. The badge was a stamp of shame and dependency for pauper families. A sign, too, of tougher attitudes and times, along with growing discrimination, a revival of pauper apprenticeship, and sustained attacks on common rights and other "makeshifts."

The last chapter is called "Negotiation," a giveaway word that if nothing else implies that there was some sort of broad plane of agreement between the haves and the have-nots on which to strike agreements or compromises in line with social policies and ideologies, something not far removed from John Walter and Keith Wrightson's groundbreaking work in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] The overall interpretative framework can seem old-hat at times: "Deference was the lubricant that greased the machinery of welfare" (p. 447). Badging for one thing does not seem to give much scope for negotiation. When is it right to substitute struggle or conflict for negotiation? Negotiation is not the best term when the odds are stacked on one side, and the other has to follow rules to the letter to get sixpence or a shilling. This is force not negotiation, and parish officers chose when and where to be flexible, and in what circumstances. Perhaps one reason why negotiation is a buzz-word in this book is that the interpretation of poverty here does not give enough attention to Dalton's "third category" of poor: the "thriftlesse poore," vagrants, thieves, timewasters, householders who ducked their responsibilities, and people at odds with the system who "refuseth to work," for whom "the house of correction [was] fittest" (p. 379). *On the Parish?* is "concerned solely with the relief of the settled poor," and "artificially ignores the wider matrix of social discipline within which the granting of outdoor relief in cash and kind was located" (p. 380). It cannot therefore give us a fully nuanced interpretation of poor relief and poverty. This is perhaps why Hindle has a softer less pessimistic angle on motivations behind administration, this was not a system "in which the faces of the poor were ground on the whetstone of social discipline." We should not "characterize" poor relief "primarily in terms of discipline, discrimination, and exclusion" (p. 365), though this is what this book does the nearer it gets to 1700. Hard disci-

pline is played down, but in a book that does not look at a lynchpin of discipline, the house of correction. The vagrant, one of the biggest bogey-figures of the times, does not appear here. Not much whipping goes on in this book, unlike four centuries ago. How many of the paupers in its pages were among the many thousands all over the land who ended up in a house of correction with whip-sting and anger? There are sections in this book that almost cry out for consideration of houses of correction–"Industry and Thrift," "Deference," "Sobriety," "Painfulness and Carefulness," "The Magistracy and the Poor," "The "Judiciary and the Poor"–and a chapter called "Work." Giving and receiving was of course the set piece of poor relief, but there was much more to a system in which "mere fear" of houses of correction was more than enough to make people toe the line.[2]

On the Parish? is also–almost polemically–about the countryside (leaving out towns also cuts the potential for disagreement and disorder). It is "a companion volume to [Paul Slack's] *Poverty and Policy*" (p. 6).[3] The logic is that Slack does towns and, thus, rural areas are still up for grabs. There is some validity in this, but I was expecting to read a case for a *distinctive* rural poverty, one that despite the varied experiences within and between rural regions (expertly covered in chapter 4) was *different* to what we know about growing towns. To what extent would the findings in this book about the pace and purpose of poor relief appear different if it looked at towns and cities not villages? The overlaps between town and country are not really noticed, vagrants and migrants with feet in both camps are not touched on. There is not enough direct comparison for a full-scale interpretation, though we are often made aware that things happened earlier in towns–rating, badging, licensed begging, work schemes. This lack of comparison leads to a problem with the use of evidence. On many pages in this book examples are pulled from towns, not for purposes of comparison but for backing to make wider points about poverty and poor relief, including: casual work to make ends meet, widows not living alone, approved begging, pawning, stocks for the poor, inmates, putting pressure on pensioners to go to church, and steps to stop paupers giving room and board to their own children once they reached marriageable age. Town and country are mixed up in evidence in these places and elsewhere. Some evidence comes from passages or policies that were intended for towns or what passed for a town in the talk of the time: *An Ease for Overseers* (1601) urges traders to buy paupers' products "for the benefit of the towne" (p. 174); charges to set the poor on work were ' "given to the overseers in every towne" (p. 179). I think it matters that urban and rural discourses and experiences should be unpicked here, not treated as one and the same in bodies of evidence, not least in a book that is otherwise good on differential experiences.

But the balance sheet is very positive. *On the Parish?* is without question the most important book on early modern poverty for almost two decades. The spadework in archives is impressive. The narrative of tougher discrimination and deterrence towards 1700 is well done. And pushing back the turning point from age-old medieval habits of giving to somewhere after 1660 when the balance tipped decisively towards "formal" charity gives us all something to think about.

Notes

[1]. J. Walter and K. Wrightson, "Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 71 (1976): pp. 22-44; and J. Walter, "The Social Economy of Dearth in Early Modern England," in *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*, ed. J. Walter and R. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 75-128.

[2]. Joanna Innes, "Prisons for the Poor: English Bridewells 1555-1800," in *Labour, Law, and Crime: A Historical Perspective*, ed. F. Snyder and D. Hay (Oxford: Routledge, 1987), p. 105.

[3]. See Joseph P. Ward, "Review of Paul Slack, From Reformation to Improvement: Public Welfare in Early Modern England," H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, January, 2000, `http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=6835949697537`.

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